Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

homemakers' chat
FOR USE IN NON-COMMERCIAL BROADCASTS ONLY
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

MONDAY, January,5, 1942

SUBJECT: "WAR REACHES THE KITCHEN." Information from agricultural economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Ever since pioneer days American women have had a reputation for being adaptable and resourceful. Now is the time to cultivate these qualities in full measure. Even in small matters of cooking and housekeeping you may need to be adaptable and resourceful in the days ahead. You may need to change your methods of doing things around the house, or to change the kind of tools and equipment you've been using all your life. You may need to use substitute materials, or to go without, as war needs demand. The war reached the kitchen months ago, and you can expect it to make more and more changes there during 1942.

You've heard and read a good deal lately about shortages of metal, paper and rubber. All these, of course, affect the home kitchen in more different ways than you can count. But there are other small everyday articles you've always taken for granted around the kitchen that have already felt the pinch of war--linen dish towels for example, and clothes line, and brooms.

The United States produces only one-tenth of the linen it uses in ordinary times. Formerly this country imported all its linen, except that made from about 12 thousand acres of flax, grown mostly in the State of Oregon. Last year those acres produced a bumper crop of flax, enough to make about 820 tons of linen fiber. But none of that linen is likely to go into dish towels, table cloths and napkins. The army needs linen for parachute shrouds and belts, for packing for steam engines and propeller shaft bearings. Army shoes need to have soles stitched with linen thread that will stand up under sweat, and rain, and mud. Life-saving stations and

the Navy must have flax for rope. Linen fibers go into the making of light fire-hose, too. These are just a few of the reasons why you may be changing from linen to cotton towels and table cloths in the months ahead.

Your clothes line may not be the same during the coming year as last year either. In fact, the experts say: "If you have a good piece of rope, dry it out carefully, and keep it clean and free from mud and oil. Keep it hanging in a dry clean place. Your next rope may not be so good, and certainly it wont last so long."

The hemp that has always gone into the making of clothes-line now must do its bit to win the war. This country has only about 8 thousand acres of hemp in Kentucky and Wisconsin. Hemp is needed to make engine-packing rope and fire hose. There will be little left for twine, or for webbing for upholstery. Another material that goes into the making of the best rope is abaca. We produce no abaca in the United States. It comes from the Philippine Islands, and that means a long haul over the Pacific ocean where every ship is needed to transport rubber, tin and tungsten. In normal times we consume from 80 to 90 thousand tons of abaca rope a year. With a two-ocean navy and new ships slipping down the ways daily, we must have rope. No nation can fight a war without rope. The farmer, the merchant, the trucker, the builder, the well-driller, the housewife--all use rope, but the men in ships get the first call, and civilians will have to take what is left.

The war also may affect the broom you use in sweeping the kitchen. The broom you like so well--the one with red fibers that remain stiff whether they are wet or dry is a broom to cherish and treat with care. Brooms like that are going to be few and far between from now on. The red fiber in the broom is palmyra from India. Ships aren't likely to be bringing in 80 or 90 thousand tons of palmyra for brooms and brushes in 1942 as they have in former years. We still grow some broomcorn in this country--in Illinois and Kansas, but the fiber is flexible and becomes soft when it is wet.

Another material housewives have always taken for granted is gunny sacking or burlap. Burlap is the material used to wrap new furniture, to make bags for potatoes, to lay over the garden geraniums to keep them from frost and to make hooked rugs. But burlap is made from jute which is produced in India. Jute has a thousand uses--twine for wrapping, bags for grain, backing for linoleum. There is not real substitute for jute at the low price we have been paying. We have used 120 thousand tons of it ever year, and it has taken up 20 boatloads of 6 thousand tons' capacity to bring it in. Next time you start to use gunny sacking to clean muddy boots at the kitchen door, or for other rough purposes, better stop to think that this is now becoming a rare, precious and valuable material that deserves care.

Other materials that will be going for military rather than home use are kapok and hair for pillows and mattresses. Kapok grows on a tree in the East Indies. Soldiers use it for sleeping bags, life preservers, flying suits. Our Army and Navy may need all the kapok that can be shipped in. As for pig hair, horse hair, and tail hair, that will probably go mostly to make mattresses for the boys at sea. If a hair mattress gets dunked in the ocean, the hair can be dried out and come back into shape in a few hours. A mattress of cotton or kapok, on the other hand, will absorb moisture and settle down a hard damp slab. So hair takes its place in our line of defense.

This gives you a glimpse of a few of the changes in materials caused by the war. But the scientists are searching for new and better substitutes that can be produced at home or in Central or South America as part of the good neighbor program. Peru is starting to grow flax, and farms in Central America abaca. Brush makers in Florida are trying out a palm fiber as a substitute for the palmyra of India. The war may reach every home, but these changes and inconveniences are a small price to pay for victory.

###

REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR